PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
August 28, 2013
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER
7:00 P.M.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL

Present: R Johnson, B. Lenart, G. Clark, M. Bullard, R. Murphy, C. Zuellig, A. Bedogne

Absent: B. Lenart (excused) P. Hollifield (excused)

Staff: Teresa Gillotti, Community Development Director
Bonnie Wessler, Planner I
Nan Schuette, Executive Secretary

Chairman Johnson welcomed a new member to the Planning Commission, Anthony Bedogne, who has recently been serving on the Zoning Board of Appeals and was a very active member.

III. AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION

Mayor Paul Schreiber, 922 Pleasant - thanked everyone on the board for their service to the city. He continued by saying that it is very important to have people with good experience on boards and Planning Commission is a great example of that, especially with two very important projects occurring in the city and the Planning Commission's direction and experience is critical to the city and its success.

Chairman Johnson also thanked the commission and staff for their time and involvement in these projects as well as other huge projects that have been ongoing at the same time.

IV. PUBLIC HEARING ITEMS

1. Family Dollar Rezoning & PUD Plan

Chairman Johnson stated that this is a Planned Unit Development (PUD). It is a rezoning but is also like a contract with the city that requires more complex zoning. It is part of the Water Street complex. He added that this is more complex than a normal PUD in that, we are looking at previous zoning that was pre 1998 and the Master Plan that was in effect in 1998. We are also looking at a different Master Plan that was passed by this board in 2004 and zoning that is not actually officially in place but which we have been asked to recognize as well as a new Master Plan. We are being asked to review the agreement and site plan that will be presented to us this evening making a recommending to City Council to make the final decision.

Ms. Gillotti, Community Development Director, began by stating that this is the first proposed development in the Water Street redevelopment area. In May, City Council approved a development agreement for the site that included a concept plan. There were some conditions that were specific to the site plan that was included in the development agreement that are to be discussed at this meeting.

The parcel location of this property is approximately 0.84 acres plus an estimated 0.26 to establish Lincoln Street, putting it over one acre. A PUD is allowed for projects over one acre. City Council required that this go through Planning and Development to ensure quality development as part of the agreement. Ms. Gillotti added that Josh Allen, who is the architect for the project, is in attendance to discuss any questions by the board.

The concept plan for the development area has changed over time and as we were going through the Shape Ypsilanti process and how we wanted the Water Street area to look, it changed again. The Family Dollar building is proposed to be built on a lot between Park and Lincoln facing Michigan Avenue with parking on both the side and rear yards. The building is proposed to be approximately 8,320 sq. ft. with masonry block and windows along the Michigan Avenue frontage. She noted that were five different review criteria that went into this review that includes the Master Plan revision of 2008 specific to the Water Street area, regular zoning; in this case, a PUD with B3 as the underlying district, the development agreement, draft zoning that the Planning Commission did in 2009 and while City Council ultimately tabled the zoning, they have indicated that it should be used for negotiating future development and is to serve as a guideline for the proposed development and lastly, the draft Master Plan.

Ms. Gillotti gave a short overview of the proposed Family Dollar showing the location of the building, adding that the utilities will be located off Park Street, lights will be installed on all sides, windows will be clear in front and other windows will be tinted. She reviewed the parking and curb cuts, including the proposed handicap parking; on street parking will be allowed on Lincoln as is currently allowed on Park. Five bicycle parking spaces are required. A rain garden is proposed on the east side of the parcel between the parking lot and Park Street. Street trees will be required on the east side of Lincoln Street frontage per the development agreement as well as on the frontage of Michigan Avenue. Chairman Johnson asked her to review the staff recommendations.

She stated that staff recommends the Planning Commission approve the PUD plan and rezoning to PUD listing the various findings, including two exemptions: one is recommended based on zoning guidelines to reduce the number of required parking spaces to a maximum of 24 and the second is an exemption from the required entryway overlay district. She indicated that there are 23 potential conditions, which she reviewed in detail for clarification. Also noted were the various waivers that are being requested; requirement from the 3 ft berm between Michigan Avenue and parking lot, and instead, the potential of a landscaping wall; foundation planting tree requirements along Michigan and Lincoln Street and relocation of two trees on Park Street; and lastly the omission of the sprinkler system.

Commissioner Bedogne asked for clarification on Parsons Street, which Ms. Gillotti provided. Chairman Johnson asked about the orientation of the lot frontage and Ms. Gillotti responded with a detailed explanation.

Commissioner Clark moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: C. Zuellig) and the motion carried unanimously.

Josh Allan, 1404 Vine Street, Cincinnati, OH – stated that he is the architect for the project. Ms. Gillotti has done a good job of outlining where everything is – the lot location, parking, bioswale, landscaping, etc. but there are a few things he would like to address on the conditions. He reviewed a picture of the rain garden, which has an appealing look as well as function. It is standard with Family Dollar to have a sprinkler system installed. On the curb & gutters, they will be included as a standard. They will change the notes on the Lincoln Street improvements currently showing the city paying for that. They do not expect the city to pay for any improvements and will include the curb cut, sidewalk and the landscaping. He provided samples of the materials – they plan to use masonry product, structural brick, and beige base on bottom. Dumpsters will be installed with gates and match the building. They would like to have 25-30 parking spaces.

Chairman Johnson asked about the issue of the glass – reflective vs non reflective. Mr. Allan responded that this is something he can work out with staff. Chairman Johnson added that it should be noted as one of the conditions. He also asked about how the parking can be reduced and Mr. Allan stated they could get rid of seven at the back since they are less useful. They would prefer to have 25 parking spaces and reorganize the landscaping at the back. Discussion continued on various parking issues including handicap spaces. Commissioner Zuellig added there is an opportunity to put a screen wall running parallel to the building reinforcing the street edge, to which Commissioner Murphy concurred.

The issue of the monument sign was discussed with one board member stating that it should be eliminated since there was enough signage on the building itself but no specific recommendation was made.

Much discussion was held on the location of windows and canopies and the question was raised if it is possible to install windows on the Lincoln Street side of the building since it is currently just a huge brick wall with no break. Mr. Allan responded that putting windows in that location is not practical since it looks directly into the delivery area. The board encouraged Mr. Allan to look at other options rather than having just another large brick wall facing Lincoln Street and he agreed to look at this further.

Mr. Allan referred to the six street trees on Michigan Avenue stating that it is his opinion that once they mature to a potential 30', it would be difficult to see the building and is requesting that they eliminate one or two. Commissioner Zuellig was opposed to this reduction.

Irmgard Gelletly, 921 Sheridan – asked about run-off and the possibility of using water off the roof or rainwater for the sprinkler system. Chairman Johnson responded that he believes the run-off goes into the storm system like all other streets. Ms. Gelletly is concerned if the parking lot drains into the rain garden area and Chairman Johnson responded that this is an adequate concern. Commissioner Zuellig added that often they put stones in that area where the stormwater comes off the parking lot into a type of basin and collects the salt going into the plants. Also, they typically pick plant material that is salt tolerant.

Commissioner Clark moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: A. Bedogne) and the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Johnson stated that it was his opinion that Family Dollar had done an excellent job of trying to integrate their building to the community but at the same time it is a challenge. The staff report has given us an excellent write-up with good recommendations, etc. Commissioner Clark informed Mr. Allan that he had pictures of another store location showing types of windows that could be considered on the Lincoln Street side. Commissioner Zuellig agreed with Chairman Johnson that staff had worked really hard on this site plan with a lot of positive things about it. She was pleased to see they did include irrigation. She referred to the on-street parking on Lincoln adding that it should have concrete on the back and needs a guard rail and signage because of being a dead-end street. Chairman Murphy asked about the timing of completion since he is concerned because it is his opinion there are many large issues that need to be addressed, which he detailed in length. Mr. Allan responded that he hopes it would be 180 days from signing. Commissioner Clark added that this is the first site on the Water Street redevelopment area and it is very important that we get it right making sure that every detail is covered. Chairman Johnson listed the various issues that were of concern.

Mr. Allan concluded by saying that there are only two main concerns he had that he could work out with staff and had no problems with all of the other conditions and waivers.

Commissioner Murphy moved to postpone action to our September meeting but with a date certain to pick back up again. Items to be clarified by staff were: the monument sign, six trees on Michigan, confirmation of film on windows on Michigan Avenue, canopies on Lincoln Street side of building, knee wall parallel with Michigan Avenue between sidewalk and parking lot area, between 25-30 parking spaces, relocation of barrier free spaces, change plantings, maintain 30' drive with concrete at back, 10' sidewalk on Michigan Avenue (Support: A. Bedogne) and the motion carried unanimously.

2. Thompson Block Rezoning & PUD Plan

Chairman Johnson stated that this has been a high profile project for a number of years and we are happy to see movement going forward so we can take action. Ms. Gillotti presented the staff report by stating that this did not come before Planning Commission previously because it was originally a project that was based just on the building portion. It now encompasses the vacant parcel and a portion of the alley behind the two, which the applicant is trying to vacate and combine all three; the Thompson Block property, the alley and the property located at 107 E. Cross, to create a single lot size of approximately 0.56 acres; the minimum required for a historic preservation Planned Unit Development (PUD) is 0.5 acres.

In 2009, due to the damage from a fire to the southern structure, it lost its non-conforming structure status since it was not rebuilt in 18 months. As a means of addressing the illegal non-conforming status and preserve and adaptively reuse the building, the applicants have applied for an adaptive reuse of a historically significant structure PUD rezoning and site plan approval. The B3 Central Business District requires 5' setback on both sides and 25' setback when adjacent to a residential district, so one of the exemptions that the board will have to consider is for the setback exemption requirement in order to preserve the actual building facade for the building allowing it to be located in its current state, otherwise it would have to be moved back.

There is a provision in the Zoning Ordinance that allows for a smaller land area to be considered for PUD – ½ acre – if it is for preservation of a historic structure. That was determined by the Historic District Commission at their last meeting that it was within the 0.5 acre requirement.

She provided some information on the restoration of the project. There will be parking area adjacent to the east of the building providing parking for the residential units. They are planning for 10,000 sq. ft. on the first floor for commercial with 16 upper story residential lofts. Along the River Street frontage, they intend to create a concrete addition along the front of the building for outdoor seating plus sidewalk. The vacated alley and the vacant 107 E. Cross will provide for parking, stormwater management, and buffer between the development and adjacent properties. The property at 113 E. Cross is being proposed to provide additional egress by the property owner, but will be considered in a separate site plan application.

Residential access is primarily off the parking lot although it is still shown on the site plan to the north of the building where the elevator is located. Clarification is required from the owner. There is access to the commercial building at the rear of the bays; however, each bay will have its own front door.

Ms. Gillotti reviewed the parking requirements stating that currently, thirty-one parking spaces are shown, exceeding the minimum of twenty-six. The parking area is missing the required barrier-free parking spaces and lacks adequately-sized travel/maneuvering lanes. Staff is recommending maintenance of a 12 foot drive if parking is changed to 45 degree angle. No signage is planned at this time. Dumpster information needs clarification.

Staff is recommending that the Planning Commission approve the PUD plan and rezoning to PUD based on a number of findings, conditions to be addressed and waivers of foundation plantings requirement, sprinkler system and permit installation of landscaping and wall for off-street parking in lieu of berm. Ms. Gillotti offered to address any concerns.

Commissioner Zuellig asked if a schedule for the work had been provided and Ms. Gillotti responded that she would refer that question to the applicant.

Commissioner Murphy moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: G. Clark) and the motion carried unanimously.

Fred Beal, is a partner in the new entity called The Thompson Block Partners, in putting this project together since they have expanded the group. He stated that the property in question is owned by The Thompson Block. The idea centers around the building as it did before. He reviewed some of the planned changes. Due to timing, they got OHM's comments late and have not quite worked out the details on the parking lot but should be able meet their requirements on the width required. He expounded on the details. On the scheduling question, they would complete all approvals, financing, tax credit closing between now and year end, beginning the project January 1st and finishing by the end of 2014.

He introduced his architect, David Lavender. Mr. Lavender continued the presentation adding that in terms of lighting, they plan to match the same as is on the street. Regarding the ADA walks, the building frontage is roughly 132 ft. In order to provide a 1 in 20 slope, they need approximately 87 ft. Within the frontage of the building on River Street there is more than enough space to put in a slope walkway that won't require a ramp. They would work with their leaseholders in terms of the kind of signs they require but working within the signage required in the ordinance, similar to E. Cross Street.

Chairman Johnson stated that the building had been heavily damaged and wondered if there are any engineering concerns, i.e. certified that the building can withstand the major renovation? Mr. Lavender responded that the brick walls that are there used to support the exterior walls -- they are going to rebuild the interior walls to provide lateral bracing and in addition to that, the wood floors that were between the walls provided a diaphragm in the other direction, so essentially putting back what was there structurally previously will be restored. Commissioner Clark stated it was his understanding in order to make the building structurally sound, you have to rebuild the building inside the walls and wondered how much of this building has to exist in order to receive the Historic Foundation tax credits and Mr. Beal clarified how the credits and programs work.

Commissioner Murphy moved to open the public portion of the hearing (Support: G. Clark) and the motion carried unanimously.

Irmgard Gelletly, 921 Sheridan – owns the building next to the Thompson Block immediately next to the north wall. She had a number of concerns about the proposed stairwell at the north end of the building, noise from potential loft owners and the height of the building that would affect the sun exposure in the backyard of her property.

Mayor Paul Schreiber, 922 Pleasant Drive – had questions on the western façade windows, to which Mr. Beal responded.

Commissioner Bedogne moved to close the public portion of the hearing (Support: c. Zuellig) and the motion carried unanimously.

There were many questions by the board members. Further discussion was held with a consensus by the commission members that many items need to be addressed as well as more information being provided on the bioswale, elevator, planting, signage, parking, etc.

Commissioner Clark moved to postpone a decision on this project with the applicant returning on September 18th, at which time, have further clarification on the rear entrance of parking lot, landscaping, elevator, side entrance and how it will work, River St ROW and dumpster (Support: R. Murphy) and the motion carried unanimously.

V. OLD BUSINESS

1. Recreation Master Plan Update

Ms. Gillotti complimented Bonnie Wessler, for the great job she did on putting together the parks plan. Ms. Wessler stated that this is an update on the new Parks and Recreation Plan and highlights as they relate to Shape Ypsilanti. Five main areas were discussed: Water Street and Waterworks Park; Frog Island Park and Depot Town; Railroad Street; Washtenaw & Cross; and overall connectivity for pedestrians and vehicles. There are differences in the plans due to the different timelines (the Master Plan has a 10-20-year timeline; the Recreation Plan is 5-10), and these differences will be resolved prior to adoption of either plan.

The existing ball fields at Waterworks Park will be renovated with the help of the Little League. The disc golf course will be maintained and potentially a small area for a dog park will be explored.

The Recreation Plan also calls for sidewalks along Catherine Street from Waterworks down to Factory Street.

VI. NEW BUSINESS

None

VII. COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Gillotti stated that there was a report on the Non-Motorized Committee; however, it was inadvertently omitted from the packet. She will copy everyone.

VIII. FUTURE BUSINESS DISCUSSION/UPDATES

- Family Dollar
- Thompson Building
- South Prospect Church Site Plan

IX. ADJOURNMENT

Since there was no further business, Commissioner Murphy moved to adjourn the meeting (Support: G. Clark) and the motion carried unanimously.